

A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

by Sue Edwards

Ruth

Discovering God's Faithfulness in an Anxious World



LEADER'S GUIDE



Ruth: Discovering God's Faithfulness in an Anxious World
Leader's Guide © 2020 by Sue Edwards

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Before You Begin . . .

In my many years ministering to women, I've never seen them more anxious than they are today. When allowed to take over, full blown anxiety destroys lives emotionally, physically, and spiritually. It distorts reality, crushes relationships, and hamstring spiritual flourishing. How do we fight it? With God's Word. I've combined three powerful elements to give anxiety a one-two-three punch: the book of Ruth, Psalm 91, and Jesus's teaching on anxiety. I fervently pray that many women will dig deep into this study to excavate the treasures found there, asking the Lord to arm them against this deadly foe.

I'm delighted that you have chosen to unearth this study's riches. Although you may use this study guide for personal devotions, consider inviting other women to join you to add depth to your quest.

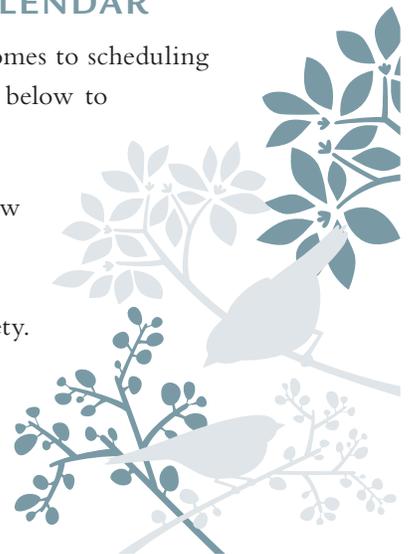
If you invite other women to join you, familiarize yourself with this overview and read the "Why Study Ruth?" section carefully. Then, as you work your way through the study, read the week-by-week leader's guide. I have included discussion topics particular to that lesson, troubleshooting tips, study enrichment ideas, and other pertinent information and counsel to aid in a productive group experience.

If you are new at leading a small group, be sure to digest the "Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders" before your first gathering. You'll find this resource on my website, www.discovertogetherseries.com, along with other helpful tools. Even if you have led groups before, consider reviewing the instructions and tips in the training guide. Skilled leaders enhance the likelihood that a group will bond and thrive, but a poor leader usually stifles healthy interaction. If you encounter particular challenges in your group, refer back to the training guide for help, or you can contact me by liking my Facebook page, "The Discover Together Series," and leaving a message or emailing me at doctorsue7@gmail.com.

ADAPTABLE OPTIONS FOR YOUR CALENDAR

The versatile format of this study allows for flexibility when it comes to scheduling your group meetings. You can mix and match the components below to create a study that fits your needs:

- Six lessons on the book of Ruth: Two women illustrate how to overcome anxiety.
- One lesson on Psalm 91: God speaks to your anxiety.
- One lesson on Jesus's teachings: Jesus speaks to your anxiety.



Consider these choices:

- One-week study on Psalm 91 or Jesus's teaching on anxiety
- Two-week study on both Psalm 91 and Jesus's teaching on anxiety
- Six-week study: Journey with Naomi and Ruth as they discover how to turn anxiety into joy.
- Seven-week study: Add the lesson on Psalm 91 or Jesus's teaching on anxiety to the front or back of the six-week study on Ruth.
- Eight-week study: Add the lessons on Psalm 91 and Jesus's teaching on anxiety before or after the six-week study on Ruth, or one lesson on each end.

Helpful insight to aid your decision:

- The book of Ruth is a story full of suspense, tragedy, excitement, and surprise. This adventure illustrates how two very different women learned to walk through intense trials and heartache into freedom from anxiety by learning to trust God.
- Psalm 91 and Jesus's teaching on anxiety provide clear directive, motivational instruction on how God can free us from the bondage of anxiety that many women experience today.

Which of these approaches will better suit your needs? Prayerfully mix and match the various options to customize a transformative learning experience for the women in your group.

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study is to prepare Christians to overcome debilitating anxiety. Of course, we all battle worry as we deal with life in a fallen world. When we encounter a crisis, it's only human to feel anxious. God has emotions, and we are made in his image. This means we are blessed with emotions too. Without healthy emotions, we would be little robots, unfeeling and uncaring. Our emotions are an integral part of what makes us able to love, experience joy, feel empathy and passion, and delight at the beauty of God's creation. However, when negative emotions like extreme fear, panic, and anxiety take over our lives, we find ourselves enslaved and unable to flourish. When women immerse themselves in God's Word about anxiety, they can strengthen their armory of faith and overcome anxiety by learning biblical attitudes, thinking patterns, and actions.

HOW TO LEAD IF LESSON TIME IS LIMITED

A thorough study of any biblical text is vital for biblical literacy that results in sound application, but if you aren't able to go through the questions without rushing or giving everyone time to participate, consider these tips:

- As the leader, quickly summarize any introductory material and move into the questions. Don't read notes or other lesson sections unless needed for clarification.
- Answer observations from the text yourself as the leader or limit the response to one person.
- Skip questions that you discern are not central to the meaning of the biblical text.
- Focus on just one section of the lesson that you sense is most applicable to your particular group. This is better than skipping around and choosing a question here and there. Understanding the flow of the text is important and builds toward valid application. Otherwise you risk twisting the Scripture.

A SAFE PLACE

Making the group an open, protected place will be especially important as you discuss these serious issues. We need a place where we can be brutally honest about our shortcomings, doubts, and fears. We need a place where no questions are off-limits. Your role as a leader is to create a safe place to process and share. Safe places destroy roadblocks to faith and bring down strongholds, resulting in spiritual, emotional, and mental health. As you guide the group with skill and a caring heart, women may actually change the way they think, feel, and act. What a privilege!

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Each lesson walks you, verse by verse, through the text. Observation, interpretation, application, correlation, opinion, and discussion questions flow, guiding you through the passages to help you grasp God's intended meaning and apply it to life today. This methodical approach is based on sound interpretive principles designed to reduce error and speculation. Occasionally women will be asked to place themselves into the setting or the shoes of those who lived the events of the Bible; these exercises, although somewhat speculative, help the passage come alive in the mind's eye of contemporary readers. Opinion and discussion questions aid in application to current and personal issues.

The goal is more than head knowledge—it's life change. Authentic growth includes new convictions and attitudes. The lessons are designed to move the participant's learning from head to heart to hand.

I will provide short commentaries on unclear or perplexing passages. My goal in this leader's guide is not to overwhelm you with massive amounts of information but instead to give you concise answers that will help you guide your group through any rough spots. It also provides additional quality resources for further study on your own.

You'll want to acquaint yourself and your group with the supplemental content available to enhance your study experience:

- *Memory Verse.* Each lesson begins with an optional memory verse related to the main topic that week. Use this tool on a volunteer basis only.
- *Digging Deeper.* Some women will want to engage with the optional Digging Deeper questions located in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work on these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a specific Digging Deeper question and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that particular Digging Deeper question, widening the discussion if possible.
- *Quotes, Background Info, and Extras.* Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any especially resonates with you, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. When you wear your small-group leader's hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher's hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a thirty-minute formal lecture, more like a senior pastor's Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you're meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

If you believe that God may want you to teach the Bible, step out and try. Women

love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than virtual teachers in a video. Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed below. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts too. So, if something in you says, “Teach!”—then go for it!

INTRODUCTORY IDEAS

If you plan to include lecturing in your format, you may want to begin with a message on the pandemic of anxiety in women today. Don't shame women who struggle. Don't advise women on whether or not to seek medical help or take medication. That's not your role. Delve into research on the topic and help women understand reasons why so many women are caught up in a web of anxiety. Share your own struggles. If you take on a teaching role, do they need to get to know you as their teacher? Do they need an opportunity to learn more about each other? Do they need time to interact, building trust and comfort in the group? Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you as you consider how to prepare your group for the study.

ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in her thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She must have a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I've worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as the time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist that they review their message with you. Stress that if they're a “time hog,” group time will be shorter, irritating other members. Use wisdom as you select presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

If you decide on a “teaching team” approach, offer training. See the book list below for resources to read and discuss together. Write out your messages and give them to each other before teaching the larger group. Meet together to ensure cohesive teaching around a common theme and avoid a disjointed feeling in the series. Seek out training, live or online, but vet it first. For in-depth, transformational training, consider seminary. Many seminaries, including the one where I teach, offer online options as well as hybrid and intensive courses that make it more feasible to earn a degree.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TEACH WITH ACCURACY AND SKILL

- Bruce, Barbara. *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults: Using Our Multiple Intelligences to Build Faith*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.
- Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
- Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006.
- Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Swindoll, Charles R. *Saying It Well: Touching Others with Your Words*. New York: Faith Words, 2012.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY RUTH

An excellent free online resource are the Bible notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, a former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. His commentaries are thorough, clear, and practical, but not overly detailed or tedious. His resources provide quality help for both academic and lay teachers and leaders. Find them on www.planofblechapel.org/soniclight.

- Chisholm, Robert B., Jr. *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013.
- James, Carolyn Custis. *The Gospel of Ruth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 1985.
- Simpson, Amy. *Anxious*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014.

LESSON 1

The Vale of Tears

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women in your group. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray.

Then spend some time getting to know one another. You might, for example, ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about her family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or icebreaker games to help your group bond or focus on the study theme. You can google icebreakers or community-builder games and locate an activity that suits your purpose for the first gathering. You might also tell a great story or illustration about a woman who overcame anxiety. Relate the story or exercise to the upcoming study when the group will work through how to actually apply what they are learning. Remind them that they will need one another, as well as God, to succeed. You may want to pray for one another as you close.

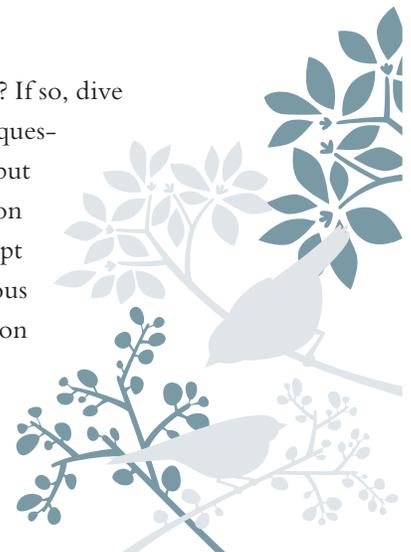
GET FOCUSED

Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Create and discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.

DISCUSS LESSON 1

Did you ask the women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, dive in. Paraphrase parts of the introductory section and ask the first question. Spend more time on the discussion and opinion questions, but don't skip observation (what does the text say?) and interpretation questions (what does the text mean?). If you do, you will interrupt the flow of the discussion, as many questions are based on previous questions. If you don't want to spend time discussing the observation



question, you may summarize the answers yourself and then move into other kinds of questions.

If you are running out of time, cut questions that do not hinder the logical flow of the lesson. If you don't have enough time to cover all the questions well, you may simply want to discuss one part of the lesson thoroughly and not address every section. Make the questions work for you and your group.

Point out that the lesson is peppered with notes to help with difficult passages and to give helpful background. Tell them to read the quotes in the sidebars as time allows. If they desire more, encourage them to tackle the Digging Deeper questions. These added elements should bring the truths of the lesson alive, and you may even want to discuss them.

LESSON CONTENT

The purpose of Lesson 1 is to acquaint your group with the setting of the book of Ruth, to identify the main characters of the story, and to discover the cataclysmic events that Naomi and her family experienced that would rock their world. We observe a number of heart-wrenching issues that still rock women's worlds today—infertility, deaths of spouses and children, single parenting, and loss of resources and status.

TROUBLESHOOTING

In order to relate to Naomi's anxiety and to help women today work through their own, we need to process these issues in our own lives, so I've asked related discussion questions. If you are leading a new group of strangers, these questions may be a bit daunting. Do all you can to create a safe place, but realize that some women are uncomfortable talking about deep hurts with people they don't know well. You may need to set the example for them by sharing your own hurts. If the women refuse to discuss some of the questions, don't be discouraged, and don't try to force them. Simply do the best you can, and focus on the questions that require less vulnerability or talk about some of the introductory material before Lesson 1. As the women learn to know and trust one another, you'll likely see more in-depth sharing.

STUDY ENRICHMENT IDEAS

- Look for stories or poems about brave women who have endured difficult situations without giving in to the anxiety they felt, and share these with the group. If you don't have time to read these stories or poems in the group, make copies or e-mail them for participants to read outside your meeting

time. Consider choosing the best and reading them during a final wrap-up week, as a review of what you learned.

- Ask each woman to write down a particular struggle that she would like to commit to God and learn to overcome during the study. One way to provide confidentiality is to furnish black ink and black paper. Then pray over the struggles and place them where they can be seen each week. Or you may want to bury them, or plant them under some flowers. Find some way to creatively express your commitment and faith that God is working as you grow through the study. The women in the group can also suggest ideas.
- Do you have participants who might like to write a drama or choreograph a dance and then present their creation before the group? If so, give them an opportunity.
- Find a quality video that brings the text alive and show it to your group.

LESSON 2

The Long Walk Home

Lesson 1 scanned a long period of time, while Lesson 2 focuses on a significant week or two in Naomi and Ruth's story. Before you dive into the questions, you are asked how many references you find to God in Ruth 1:6–22. I found ten, but it may depend on what version of the Bible your participants use. The point is simply that even in her grief, Naomi continues to include God in her perspective, yet her circumstances have become so painful that she believes God has turned against her. We might be tempted to fault her for her sour attitude, but if we endured a similar string of devastating events, many of us would struggle with the same feelings. Yet God doesn't abandon her or condemn her, and he doesn't condemn us either.

We do observe a great contrast between Naomi's and Ruth's attitudes toward God. Both have lost a husband. Ruth has dealt with infertility, a mark of God's lack of favor in that era. Yet she doesn't seem bitter toward God. How did Ruth come by a deep faith in Israel's God? We can only surmise that she learned it from Naomi and her family.

In addition, Ruth expresses a loyal love toward her mother-in-law, Naomi. Where did this pagan woman learn to love the way God loves? Again, she must have witnessed this loyal love, this *hesed*, lived out in the family she married into.

As the members of your group wrestle with what they observe in the initial pages of this story, help them understand the great love God has for them, even if they are caught in a web of anxiety. God doesn't shame Naomi, but we will see him orchestrate circumstances to help her regain her strong faith and rejoice again. And he will do the same for us. Stay tuned.

TROUBLESHOOTING

If the women in your group are confused by the differences between Ruth and Naomi's culture and ours, spend some time talking about the notes I provide on page 25. Without these cultural insights, the participants may have a difficult time understanding what's happening and why. Don't let these misunderstandings cause women to distort what God wants to teach us all through this beautiful account.

Some scholars say Naomi is a female Job. In the Digging Deeper question on page 26, I've asked students to compare Naomi's words in Ruth 1:13 with Job's statements in Job 16:12–13 and 27:2. The point of the question is to help women realize the extent of Naomi's suf-



fering and to approach her with more compassion than criticism. Both lost precious people in their lives. Both lost their livelihood. And both wrestled with a bitter attitude toward God. The Bible records the process that these two people who loved God deeply endured to fight their way back to trusting God and understanding his ways better. I hope the comparison will help women offer grace not only to Naomi but also to themselves and others if faced with these kinds of devastating situations.

Question 18 asks how intense grief and ten years' separation might change someone's appearance. The idea arises out of the townswomen's question in Ruth 1:19: "Can this be Naomi?" Of course she's older in years, but this question makes us wonder what kind of physical changes can be brought on by intense anxiety over long periods of time. The observations may serve as an encouragement to deal with anxiety in healthy ways.

LESSON 3

The Harvest

In Lesson 3, we observe God orchestrating a plan to resurrect Naomi’s faith. Ruth sets out to find food for herself and her mother-in-law and “just so happens” to choose a field that will lead to life-altering consequences for them both.

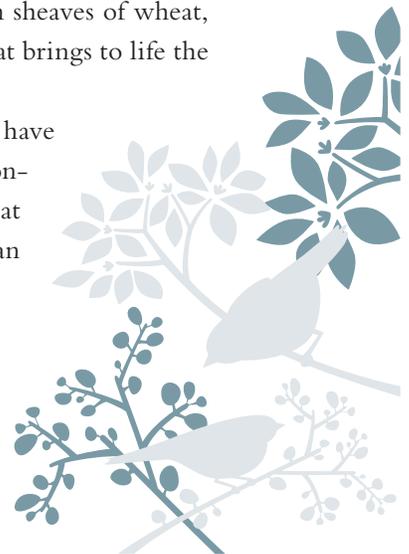
Encourage your group to notice conversations and situations that God will use to bless these two desperate women.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Much of this lesson centers around the developing relationship between Ruth and Boaz. Sometimes women overlay their own romantic twist on this relationship in chapter 2. It’s tempting for women to believe all life’s problems will be solved if they meet and marry the right man, like in a romance novel, chick flick, or Hallmark movie. If you see the discussion moving in that direction, remind them that Boaz is probably much older than Ruth and there’s no romantic spark evident in the text. Also for a man in that culture to become a wealthy businessman and a town leader, he was probably already married with children of his own. Marriages were arranged by families for the families’ benefit and longevity, and not because a romantic “click” existed between the future husband and wife. If your group assumes the book of Ruth is mainly a love story about Ruth and Boaz, they will easily miss the main message God has for us. They may also assume that all their needs will be met and all their anxiety will be cured through a romantic relationship. Although a healthy marriage can bring tremendous joy, blessings, and fulfillment in a woman’s life, it was never designed to fill the hole in a woman’s heart that only Jesus can fill.

STUDY ENRICHMENT IDEAS

- Use a harvest theme in some creative way. Decorate with sheaves of wheat, supply fresh baked bread to the participants, or find art that brings to life the setting of this passage.
- Enlist a panel of both single and married women who have found tremendous fulfillment in life through their relationship with the Lord and by serving him. Ask questions that help students see that both single and married women can flourish when their first love is Jesus—the Bread of Life.



LESSON 4

The Ask

The pace of our adventure slows down even more. Chapter 3 covers a significant day and night that will result either in ruin for Ruth and Naomi or blessings. They are without family, food, and a future. Reasons to be anxious still exist. How will they survive? Naomi has a renewed faith in God that results in a plan.

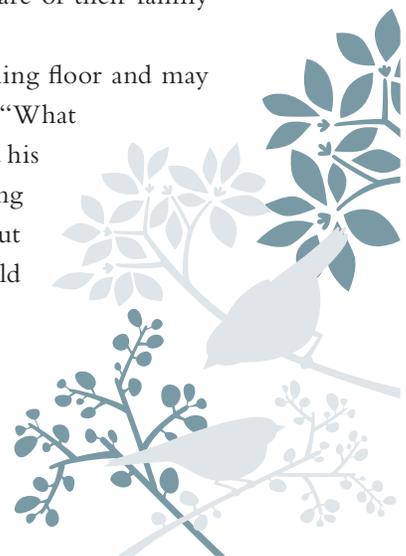
TROUBLESHOOTING

Lesson 4 focuses on the actions of two bold, shrewd women. Naomi is bold and shrewd because she understands God’s provisions for defenseless women in that culture and she strategizes a way to use them for her own good and the good of her dear daughter-in-law and their future family. Ruth is bold and shrewd because she trusts in God and the wisdom of her mother-in-law to the extent that she places herself in an extremely vulnerable position to communicate their needs and activate a rescue plan. In a symbolic gesture, she asks for help in a way that people of that time would understand. But they are counting on their assessment that Boaz is a good man, and if they are wrong in their assessment, they place Ruth in potential danger. If your group struggles to understand what’s going on in this lesson, help them by explaining these dynamics.

Although Ruth and Naomi have every reason to be anxious, they have not let that emotion rule them. They look to God and take action, trusting in God’s guidance. They model courage in the face of anxiety, a beautiful example for us.

Question 1 concerns Ruth’s attire. Customarily when women were widowed, they would wear widow’s clothes, some for the rest of their lives. Naomi seems to be asking Ruth to end the ritual time of grieving by laying aside her widow’s attire and making herself presentable as a potential wife, according to the customs of the time that made the nearest male relative responsible for the welfare of their family members.

Questions 3 through 7 relate to Ruth’s actions on the threshing floor and may seem strange to us today. The women in your group may wonder, “What was Ruth doing when she lay at Boaz’s feet and asked him to spread his garment over her?” Ruth was asking Boaz to give her the covering of his family, to protect, include, and provide for not only herself but also Naomi in the spirit of the levirate and guardian-redeemer Old Testament laws.



STUDY ENRICHMENT IDEA

- Bring in an expert trauma counselor for an interview on active ways to overcome anxiety.

LESSON 5

The Obstacle

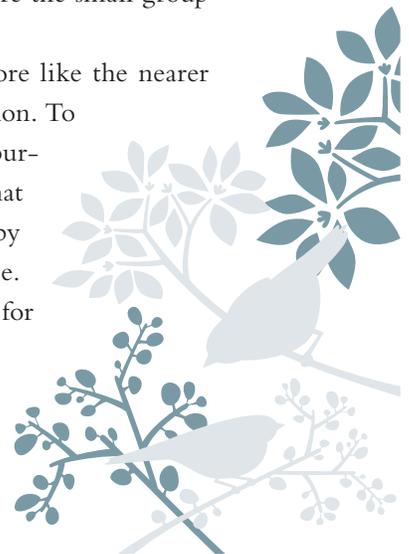
The next day Boaz heads to the area of town where legal issues were transacted. We need to attempt to read between the lines and discern why he decides to help Ruth and Naomi out of their desperate situation. Is it because he has fallen madly in love with Ruth and wants her for his wife? Many women love a good romance and overlay this story with the Western preoccupation with romance and sex. We have no way of knowing Boaz’s motivation except by looking at his former behavior. Why does he call her daughter? How does he interact with Ruth during the months she gleanes in his fields? How does he treat her when he finds her at his feet in the middle of the night?

The more I study Ruth and the Old Testament culture, the more I see Boaz with different motives—not a lusty old man but a Christ figure, a godly man who has compassion on family members who desperately need his help. What will he gain? More mouths to feed. Ruth bore her husband no children, so that makes her unfit as a future wife if we use Old Testament values. And yet Boaz steps forward to care for two women on the lowest rung of the social scale. Why? I believe he’s exhibiting *hesed*, that loyal love that God bestows on us, to illustrate that God never abandons his own. He works through others in sovereign and mysterious ways to care for us, even when we struggle to trust him.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Lesson 5 will cause confusion if we discount the complicated legal laws that governed Old Testament communities. Digest what’s going on legally and help your group understand if they are confused. I’ve added notes to help, but you, as the leader, may need to explain these customs as clearly as possible. If you have added a teaching time to your study, this may be a time to have the teacher lecture before the small group begins, if she’s been teaching after the group discussion.

Question 6 asks us to think about whether we would be more like the nearer relative or Boaz if we were faced with the same kind of legal situation. To understand why the nearer relative did not want to take on the “burden” of marrying Ruth and taking in Naomi, we need to know what would be expected of him. His duty would have been to sire a son by Ruth and to give that son a portion of his current son’s inheritance. The decision would be costly not only for the redeemer but also for



his children. However, Ruth was known to be barren so this might not have been a factor. But Boaz was willing to step in regardless.

Question 7 asks how we might apply the spirit of the levirate marriage and the guardian-redeemer laws to our lives in an age of grace. The answer is found in the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:34–40. Love God and love others with *hesed* love. I believe that's what we see in Boaz—a godly man guided by God's desire to show mercy for the vulnerable, even women. If I'm correct, then we have a marvelous picture of reasons to trust God and give him our anxiety. Like Ruth and Naomi, we are his daughters and he is for us. He's the master of our stories, and he promises to bring beauty out of ashes as we follow and trust him.

The Digging Deeper question next to question 11 (p. 56) relates to the issue of barrenness in women of the Bible. Like Rachel, Leah, and other women, Ruth was believed to be barren since she and Naomi's son had not produced an heir. In a culture where everything was dependent on the family for survival and passing down their land and possessions, the greatest tragedy they could imagine was to be a family without a male heir. They viewed infertility as a curse, and providing this heir was a woman's top priority. A study of this issue will help students understand why Ruth was considered the lowest of the low and why Boaz's actions to redeem her are a great example of God's *hesed* love. If women in your group struggle with infertility themselves, help them understand that a woman's worth then and now is not dependent upon her ability to bear children. Refer them to Dr. Julie Shannon's website, provided on page 19 of your study guide.

STUDY ENRICHMENT IDEA

- Dramatize what happens in this lesson to help women understand what's going on. Ask participants to write a play that explains clearly the legal issues of the day and shows the *hesed* heart of Boaz as he obeys God and steps up to care for others.

LESSON 6

The Serendipities

Yes, it's a love story—but not so much between Ruth and Boaz. It's about the love of a compassionate God, especially for Naomi and Ruth as given in this account. They experience horrendous tragedy. Everything that could go wrong did.

What is God trying to teach us through this true story? The Lord grieves when he sees so many of his daughters caught up in a web of debilitating anxiety today. He wants us to know that even when we can't feel it, he is with us and orchestrating blessings on our behalf, often in this life and absolutely in the next. This is why this story has been included in God's holy Bible.

TROUBLESHOOTING

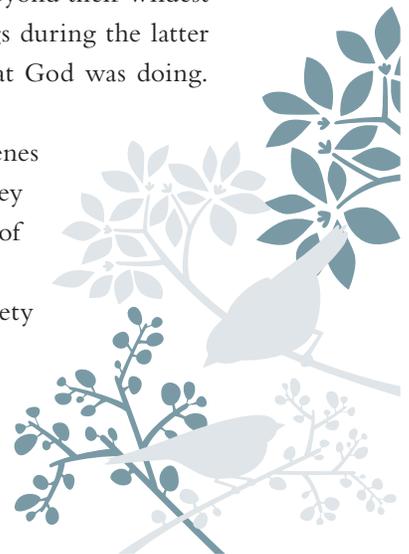
Note the emphasis on Naomi in the final passage of this book. In our culture that focuses on youth and beauty, this may seem rather strange. If the emphasis on Naomi comes up in the group, explain that older people were revered in that culture, seen as patriarchs and matriarchs in families. Extended families all lived together, tending their farms or shops, working as one for the benefit and survival of all.

Question 1 asks why Obed's birth was a special reason to praise God. This question refers to Ruth's ability now to bear a child when she had been seen as barren before. We don't know if her former husband was unable to sire a child or whether the Lord worked miraculously to enable her to conceive, but regardless, Obed's birth was considered a special blessing from God.

Questions 13 through 16 focus on the incredible lineage of this family, including King David and ultimately the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Don't pass over the amazing fact that Ruth, a Moabite woman considered on the bottom rung of society, is listed in the genealogy of our Savior and King. God was working behind the scenes during the desperate days of two lonely, hopeless women to bless them beyond their wildest expectations. Undoubtedly, they enjoyed many temporal blessings during the latter days of their lives, but they never lived to see the extent of what God was doing. However, they will in the future.

Help anxious women see that God is working behind the scenes in their lives, too, even when they can't see him and even when they allow anxiety to shackle them. Encourage them to take the lessons of this study in Ruth to heart and respond with hope.

Lessons 7 and 8 in this study guide approach the issue of anxiety more directly. In divine narrative literature like Ruth, we must



extrapolate truths from the circumstances. In Lessons 7 and 8, the lessons are more straightforward. If those lessons don't fit with your timetable now, encourage the women to work those lessons on their own. If you do have the time, encourage the woman to continue in their quest to overcome debilitating anxiety through the study of Psalm 91 and Jesus's teaching.

LESSON 7

God Speaks to Your Anxiety: Psalm 91

This magnificent psalm is a conversation between God and someone who has learned how to be free of debilitating anxiety. Be sure that your group understands who is speaking as they work through the lesson and discuss the psalm.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Psalm 91 is jam-packed with analogies and descriptive images to enrich its meaning. For example, question 8 asks students to define a fowler's snare, deadly pestilence, and a rampart. Fowlers are bird hunters, and their snares are traps they use to catch their prey. Deadly pestilence is serious disease, and a rampart is a wall or bank around a castle to defend its inhabitants from their enemies.

Question 19 refers to the last line of the psalm when God says, "I will . . . show [her] my salvation." I've listed the five different meanings of the word *salvation* in Scripture in the sidebar to help your group answer this question. The women's answers may vary.

STUDY ENRICHMENT IDEA

- Psalm 91 contains a number of helpful passages to remind women of God's power to enable them to overcome debilitating anxiety. Create a bookmark, plaque, or some other artifact for the women to take home and place in a prominent place as a reminder of the beautiful truths in this psalm.



LESSON 8

Jesus Speaks to Your Anxiety

This lesson is an in-depth study of Luke 12:22–34, wise words to help us overcome anxiety straight from the lips and heart of Jesus. His words provide a fitting conclusion to our study on overcoming crippling anxiety. The lesson is full of application questions. Be sure to emphasize these kinds of questions.

TROUBLESHOOTING

I use the word *gift-mix* in the fourth paragraph of the introduction to the lesson. When we become believers, God gives each of us spiritual gifts to use to serve the church and others for the rest of our lives. Usually, we receive more than one, and they usually complement each other. I call the combinations of our spiritual gifts our “gift-mix.”

STUDY ENRICHMENT IDEAS

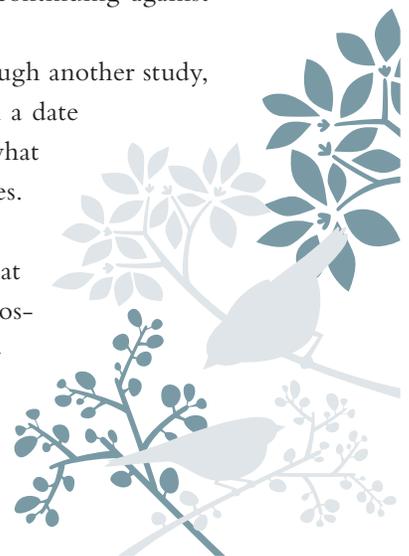
- Plan a half day for your group to spend in prayer, reflecting on what you’ve learned in this study. Find a quiet place. If you like, decorate with candles and lower the lights. Create an idea sheet to hand out with passages to ponder and suggestions for prayer. Include time alone and time together. Pepper your time together with group prayer time, worship, readings, and singing.

WILL YOU SAY GOODBYE OR GO ON TOGETHER?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don’t be pressured into continuing against your better judgment.

If you determine you’re excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If so, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study next and what changes might be in order, if any. (See www.discovertogetherseries.com for additional study options.)

Either way, use this last gathering to review and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure, possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other spe-



cial activity. For example, you might talk about how God has helped you overcome anxiety. You could list benefits you enjoyed as a result of the study. You might talk about changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say goodbye and pray for them.